

A
LETTER

In Answer to a

CITY FRIEND,

Shewing how Agreeable

Liberty of Conscience

Is to the

CHURCH of ENGLAND.

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L O N D O N,

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WILLIAM H. HARRIS

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

1884

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L E T T E R

In Answer to a City Friend,

S H E W I N G,

How Agreeable *Liberty of Conscience* is to the
Church of England.

S I R,

I Have receiv'd Yours, wherein you seem to make some Reflections upon the Church of *England*, and with some earnestness to desire my Opinion in the Affair, especially in relation to the late *Indulgence* granted by His Majesty for *Liberty of Conscience*. To a Friend I cannot deny so small a Request. I'll therefore, without any farther Preamble freely speak to the Points you propos'd, and so leave them to your Consideration.

First, As to what you apprehend, that this *Indulgence* will not be well lik'd by the Church of *England*, 'tis my Opinion you are under a Mistake: My Reason is, because the Church of *England* is a Church, whose greatest Glory has been in its *Moderation* and *Tenderness*. Now what occasion of Trouble can it be to a *Tender-hearted Church*, to see all Christians peaceably professing their Religion, without any possibility of Vexation from their Neighbors? Were the Church of *England* a Church that took

pleasure in Wracking of Consciences, in Oppression of their Neighbors, in Persecuting and Imprisoning, I should be something of your Mind, and begin to suspect, that this *Liberty* would not be at all agreeable to such a Temper : But you know how She has always declar'd against *Cruelty* and *Violence* on the Score of Conscience : She detests and abominates all such Proceedings ; and you cannot think She'll now so degenerate, as to grieve for these Things being taken out of her Power, which She glory'd before to have *Reform'd*. You seem not to be thoroughly acquainted with the Constitution of this *Church* and Her *Members*, if you think 'twill be an Aggrievance to 'em, because 'tis not in their Power to *Persecute*. If you had but heard their Doctrins, and read the Sermons they have Preach'd and Printed on this Subject, you must needs take 'em for the greatest *Dissemblers* and *Hypocrites* in the World, if after so many repeated Claims to *Moderation* and *Meekness*, they should be still in love with Persecution, and cannot see their Neighbors Exercise their Religion in quiet, but this Quiet of their Neighbor must be Their Persecution. Alas this wou'd argue in them a Poor Spirit of Christianity, 'twou'd make any one suspect the Sincerity of their Preaching, and put into us a Jealousie that what they condemn in others, they love to practise themselves.

But you fear this *Liberty* will introduce *Heresies* and *Schisms* into the Church, which cannot be well pleasing to the Church of *England*, whose Concern it has always been, to maintain a *Unity* and *Uniformity* amongst Believers. And here I must take the freedom again to tell you, you do not judge of Things aright. Mr. *Kidder's* Sermon Licenc'd by the Archbishop's Chaplain, and Publish'd the last Week, concerning the *Judgment of Private Discretion in Matters of Religion*,

ligion, would inform you better, especially pag. 20. where he tells you, 'Tis a fond thing to imagine that there shall be no Heresies or Schisms, and that we have found a Way to prevent them : This is like the Boast of a Mountebank.—God hath foretold that there should come a Falling away, and that some should be under strong Delusions, and believe a Lie. It is a vain thing to pretend a Remedy against that Evil, against which God himself has provided none. Now what reason have you to think, that if Heresies and Schisms should arise, they would occasion any Disturbance to the Church of England, whenas they are very well satisfi'd, there must be Heresies; that 'tis a Fond thing to imagine they can be prevented; and that 'tis but Vain and Mountebank-like to pretend Remedy against such an Evil, against which God has provided none? If they must come, they must. The Church of England is Wise enough to Foresee these Evils, and bear them with Patience, without an Unnecessary Care or Solitude to Prevent them. But I don't know what you may call Heresie and Schism: You know the Church of England, as Mr. Kidder delivers her Doctrin, is not for having Her Followers Guided in Matters of Religion by any Authority, nor taking up their Faith upon Confidence of any Church Christ has left and assisted for this purpose; No, this he looks upon as a Slavish Surrender, and the way to despoil a Man of his Rational Faculties; This Mr. Kidder in the same Sermon undertakes to prove a Vain and Impious Principle; 'tis to bid Men Pull out their Eyes, and go Blindfold. And therefore to avoid such Impiety, as 'tis to bid Men Follow, Hear and Believe the Church, He is for having Every Man set up for the Judgment of Private Discretion, directs his Hearers, to Search and Examine for themselves, assures them They need no Guide, if they use their Eyes; that a Man of Ordinary

Ordinary Capacity is able to Judge, what is *True* or *False*, in Matters of Faith and Religion: *That All the Articles of the Creed* (p. 19.) *are so plainly taught in the Holy Scriptures, that he who Runs may read them there:* that therefore, tho' the Judgment of the Church be not to be trusted in these Things, yet every Man may very safely follow and rely on his own Judgment of *Private Discretion*. And this is very fairly made out by Mr. Kidder, to the admiration even of those who are not of his Mind.

Now here I desire you to consider, when the *Church of England*, as appears by Mr. Kidder and other her Doctors, has encourag'd all her Followers, to Search and Judge for themselves in Matters of Faith and Religion, can it be any trouble to her, to see Men Judge for themselves, and follow every Man his own Judgment? If They do what she directs them, it ought to be a Comfort to Her, and not any Trouble. You wou'd certainly make the *Church of England* a very Severe and Hard Mother; first in bidding her Children not to Trust Her, but to follow Their own Eyes; and then to be Angry and Peevish, when they take their own Eyes for their Guides, and don't follow Hers. If they should forsake their own private Understanding of the Scriptures in any Article or Doctrin of Faith, and submit to any Church-Interpretation of it, She tells them, this is to *hoodwink their Reason*, 'tis *taking up Religion upon trust*, 'tis *blindly giving up themselves to a Guide, who may lead them to the Regions of Darknesh*. Is not this to tell them, they ought to adhere in all Points of Faith and Religion to their own *Private Judgment of Discretion*, and not take heed to the Guidance of any Church or Authority whatsoever? And pray now what's the plain English of all this, but *Liberty of Conscience*? And since

since the *Church of England* has been so many Years pleading for this *Free Judging and Determining*; and giving Direction to every Man, to erect within himself this Tribunal of *Private Discretion*, can She be in reason thought to be Angry, when the *Civil Power*, concurring with Her, Establishes and Confirms to every Man that Right, which She holds forth as a Thing belonging to them, as they are Rational Creatures? This is an Absurdity not to be charg'd on any Society of Men, To give Directions, and then to be Angry when they are follow'd.

But to pass to your next Point; You know the Christians, who have the Benefit of this *Indulgence*, are chiefly such as are call'd *Nonconformists* and *Dissenters*, or else the *Papists*. Now I am perswaded, it can be no Aggrievance to the *Church of England*, that Both these Sorts be allow'd the Enjoyment of this *Liberty of Conscience*. For as to the *Former*, it is the Opinion of many Eminent Divines, and other Sober Men, that most *Nonconformists* differ not from the *Church of England* in any *Essential* or *Material* Point; but chiefly in *Ceremonies*, *Circumstantials* and *Unnecessaries*. Now if you peruse the Writings of the *Church of England*, of her Prelates and Doctors, you'll find that many of them have freely inclin'd of themselves to a Condescension to these Weaker Brethren, and have been willing to abate many of these *Circumstantials* in consideration of a better Union, and stricter Peace. Do we value (says Dr. *Stillingsfleet* in his Preface to the *Unreasonableness of Separation*) a few indifferent Ceremonies, and some late Declarations, and doubtful Expressions, beyond the Satisfaction of Mens Consciences, and the Peace and Tranquillity of the Church?— I do think it would be a part of Christian Wisdom and Condescension in the Governors of our Church to remove those
Bars

Bars from a freedom in joyning in full Communion with us.
 — Such a Review may be so far from being a Dishonor to this Church, that it may add to the Glory of it. I think we have no cause to doubt. (says Dr. Tillotson in his Sermon on John 13. Ver. 34, 35.) but the Governors of our Church are Persons of that Piety and Prudence, that for Peace sake, and in order to a firm Union among Protestants, they would be content, if that would do it, not to insist on little Things, but to yield them up, whether to the Infirmary, or Imporunity, or perhaps, in some very few Things, to the plausible Exceptions of those who differ from us. Necessary Points (says Dr. Barrow, Treat. of the Pop. Supr. pag. 219.) may and will by all Honest People be known and determin'd by the clear Testimony of Scripture, and other Points need not to be determin'd. And again, A more ready way to determine Controversies, is, for every one Not to Prescribe to others, or to Persecute; for then Men would more clearly see the Truth, and Consent. With these concur several others of the First Rank, which I could quote at large; but these are sufficient to undeceive you, and let you see, that 'tis not at all likely, that the Church of England, which has been, and is at present, if I am rightly inform'd, willing to abate in her *Worship* a great part of these Ceremonies, should be at all concern'd to see the Dissenters have the Free Exercise of their Religion and *Worship*, without the Obligation of observing those Ceremonies, which She her self, by her Free Offer of Condescension, seems not unwilling, at least for Peace sake, to leave out of Her *Public Service*. As long as Her chief Concern is the Peace and Tranquillity of the Church, and the Satisfaction of Mens Consciences, 'tis not to be imagin'd, She'll ever be inclin'd to disturb this Peace, or molest Her Neighbor, upon the Score of a Few Indifferent Ceremonies, Late Declarations, or Doubtful Expressions.

Expressions. She's satisfi'd, that for all *Necessary Points*, every Honest Man will know them by Scripture, and for such as are *not Necessary*, She thinks it better not to Determine them, nor Prescribe them to others, nor to Persecute any on this Score. What Disquiet therefore can it possibly cause in the *Church of England* to see a *Liberty* granted to the *Nonconformists* of performing their Service without these Ceremonies?

And as for the *Papists*, 'tis generally granted, that They agree with all other Christians in *Fundamentals*, holding all things that are of *Necessity* to be *Believ'd*; and upon this Consideration, I cannot but think, that the *Church of England* will be willing to allow them the Freedom of their Religion; it being the Generally receiv'd Opinion of *Protestants*, that the True way to make a Lasting Union amongst Christians, is to distinguish betwixt *Things necessary to be Believ'd*, and *Tenets not necessary to be Believ'd*; and *Necessaries being once agreed on, to use a Forbearance in things Unnecessary*. Why then, for the greater Extension of Christian Charity, may not this *Forbearance* be extended to *Papists*, since in all *Necessaries* they agree with other Christians? Besides, if I mistake not, the *Church of England* has so much Charity, as to think, that *Papists may be Sav'd*: This allows the *Papists* to be Sons of God and Members of Christ; and if *They* and the *Church of England* have *One Common Head* in Heaven, ought not they to have an Affection for them on Earth? Can it be allowable in them to hate Those whom, as they own, Christ will receive? Or can They say to Them, *Go ye Cursed*, to whom our Lord will say, *Come ye Blessed*? If God owns them as Sons, I believe the *Church of England* may easily love them as Brethren: For if God admits them to the Participation of his Kingdom, it becomes not any to be

averse from them on Earth, with whom they shall converse in Heaven.

And if the *Papists* are not so good Christians as to be the Members of Christ and capable of Salvation, but as others seem to take them, *Idolaters*, *Superstitious*, *Prophane*, without *Sense* or *Reason*, or any Ground of *Scripture* for what they teach or do ; it ought still to be the Concern of the *Church of England*, to let them partake of this *Liberty* ; that so They being in *Public*, their *Follies* and *Superstitions* might be more expos'd ; that the People might hear those *Absurd* and *Unchristian* Doctrins from their own Pulpits and Catechisms, and bear Witness of them, and so see whether all be not True, that has been charg'd against them. This would better end all the Controversie of *Misrepresenting* than many Volumes, and save the *Church of England* any farther trouble of *Laying the Papists open*, which, if it could be excus'd, would be no small Advantage to Her ; this thing of mixing *Invectives* and *Satyrs* against Neighbors with the *Gospel* in Pulpits, being no small Reflection upon Her with several sorts of People ; Some taking it to be *Railing*, others to be *Ungentile* and *Unmannerly*, others to be *Uncharitable*, others to be an Effect of *Sloth* and *Idleness*, whilst they think it much easier to *Ridicule* anothers Opinion, than to *Prove* their own, or find out a more serious Matter for *Exhortation*. In fine, if the *Papists* are thus *Wicked* and *Abominable*, the surest way to weaken them, is to make them *Public* ; for *Wickedness* and *Abomination* seeks for *Corners*, and thrives most when 'tis conceal'd ; when if 'twere expos'd to the *Public*, 'twould be detested by the Beholders, and be soon hiss'd out of the World.

I have only One thing now more to Consider, and 'tis that you apprehend, that this *Indulgence* will be too favour-

favourable to many Disaffected Parties and Persons, that 'twill give them occasion to encrease and thrive, and grow up so many Enemies to the King and Government, which cannot be acceptable to the *Church of England*, which on all Occasions has been so truly Loyal, and Faithful to their Monarch. To this I need say no more, than that I find our present Sovereign, who in this is chiefly concern'd, has Consider'd this Point; and he is of Opinion, that on the contrary, this *Liberty* will remove Animosities, break Factions, and make Friends of Enemies; the Constraint and Rigor that has been us'd to Mens Consciences, for the maintaining Uniformity in Worship, having created ill Blood, and been the Occasion of those Unnatural Rebellions, that have disturb'd this Nation for many Years. Now you know our Prince, whom God preserve, besides his Great Wisdom, has had so long Experience of the Temper of his People, and is so careful for the Good and Peace of the Kingdom, that no *Loyal* or *Good* Subject can think he do's not provide for the Welfare and Tranquillity of it, in the Best and Safest way possible. And since the *Church of England* is so Eminent for its Loyalty, I cannot imagine She can be troubled at what the King do's for the Safety of his Royal Person and Good of his People; or be for the persisting in such a Method, which his Majesty conceives has made the Government Uneasie to his Royal Predecessors, and in some manner occasion'd the most barbarous Effusion of Royal Blood.

This is sufficient to satisfy you in the chief Difficulties you propos'd; and to remove out of your Mind that Diffidence you seem'd to have of the *Church of England* in this Juncture of Affairs. Consider what *Loyalty* is, and for the future take thence a Measure of their Behaviour. Never question, but where this admirable *Quali-*

lity of a Good Subject is, 'twill labor to unite the Peoples
 Hearts with the Prince, 'twill cause an Approbation of
 what he do's in the Administration of his Government,
 and never permit any, by shewing a *Dislike* to his Orders,
 by being *Sour* and *Pecvish*, to alienate the Peoples Hearts
 from their Sovereign. No, never think this of *Good*
 and *Loyal Subjects*; this is only for *Malecontents*, and such
 as are *Disaffected* to the Government; for such as are
 for keeping up a *Party*, or maintaining a *Faction*: And
 if you find any do thus Disloyally, never take them for
Members of the Church of England. Every Good Chri-
 stian and Loyal Subject will be for removing *ANIMO-*
SITIES and *JEALOUSIES*, and Laying these
two Devils of this Nation. Let You and I contribute to
 it with the best of our Endeavours, and as much as in us
 lies, follow St. Paul's Advice of *Living peaceably with*
all men. Farewel.

S I R,

Your Servant.